



The Right Stuff for Schools and Communities

Employers can:

- Offer more flexible work schedules so parents can take time off to attend and become involved in school and related educational activities, such as parent-teacher conferences, the Parent Teacher Association, field trips, athletic events and other social activities.
- Initiate volunteer programs that encourage employees to become mentors, coaches and tutors or to help improve schools' technology infrastructure, buildings and grounds.
- Offer parenting education sessions for interested parents.
- Provide information services to parents related to post-secondary education and training for their children.

Communities can:

- Encourage civic, service, religious and charitable groups to promote responsible parenthood within their membership and across the country.
- Open their facilities to encourage after-school and evening educational and recreational activities and courses for children and their parents.
- Provide opportunities for community-wide social and recreational events for families.
- Organize school, family, community college and university and public and community agency support for families within their community.

Schools and educators can:

Communicate with parents.

- Provide nonresident fathers with student progress reports and other important information as well as the mother.
- School notices: Mothers and fathers should know they are welcome at school and should receive communications from school. If mother and father live in the same home, address school notices to both of them-not just to the mother. If one parent does not live in the same home as the child, that parent should also receive notices from the school unless there is a legal reason to the contrary. Discretion should also be used in cases where separation exists for the protection of family members.

Communicate clearly to all parents that fathers and mothers as well are expected to be involved. There are many simple ways to do this.

- Enrollment forms: When enrolling a child in your school or early childhood development program, ask explicitly for both the mother's and father's name, address and phone numbers.
- Calls home: When calling a child's home, do not assume that you have to speak to the mother. Your completed enrollment form will give you an indication of whether dad resides in the same household.
- School or center meetings: When inviting parents to a meeting, make clear that you would like and expect both parents to attend, if possible. It may be necessary to reschedule some meeting times to ensure that mother and father are able to attend.
- Alternatives to volunteering: Let parents know that parent involvement does not only mean volunteering at school, preschool or Head Start program. Helping their child learn at home or outside of school are important forms of involvement.

Provide information and training to parents and school or center staff.

- For many dads, fathering education would positively affect their ability to impact their child's education. Schools, centers and programs can provide classes or sessions on building a warm, caring relationship with children that includes strategies like: listening to a child's problems, giving advice, explaining rules, monitoring school performance, helping with homework, engaging in projects and giving praise and using discipline, without the use of physical force, to deal with misbehavior. Note that many nonresident dads put the emphasis on having "fun" while they are with their children because they do not want to risk starting a conflict.
- Teaching mothers and fathers how to tutor their children in basic subjects and/or help their children, for example with motor skills development has also been designated as an area of need. This support to children's learning can be given through home visits or at parent workshops in schools or other childcare and community centers.
- For school staff, information and training could include technical assistance on topics such as making home visits and positive phone calls, appreciating diversity and family strengths, developing skills for parent-teacher conferences that address both mothers' and fathers' questions and concerns and helping families become stronger learning environments.
- Establish family resource centers in schools. In centers, parents can read or borrow books on parenting, meet informally with teachers, attend small workshops, and learn of local jobs, services and programs. Provide books, workshops and meetings specifically for fathers.
- Adjust school and childcare activity schedules to meet family needs. Host parent-child breakfasts before the work day begins or dinners after work so that parents can meet teachers. childcare providers and other school or center staff.

Create a parent friendly environment. Many parents feel uncomfortable visiting their children's school for reasons that school personnel may not even realize. If a parent did not do well in school personally, he or she may feel insecure any time they enter a school setting. There are many easy ways to make parents feel welcome.

- Warm greetings. Nothing breaks the ice like a warm welcome. Greet parents by name when they attend school events, and tell them how glad you are to see them.
- Recognize children's progress. All parents love to hear good news about their children. Whether parents are visiting school or a center for regularly scheduled meetings, or because their child is having some particular problem, find something positive to say about their child's progress.
- Reinforce parents' contributions. All parents want to know - and rarely hear - that they are contributing to their children's education. If you recognize the contribution a parent is making to his or her child's learning, he or she will be more likely to want to return.
- Father-to-father and mother-to-mother strategies. Develop strategies and programs that encourage older fathers and mothers to mentor young fathers and mothers and young fathers and mothers to mentor first-time fathers and mothers.
- Parent-teacher meetings. When parents attend parent-teacher meetings, make sure to include both parents in the discussion. Teacher body language is a good sign of whether or not one parent is being included. Is your chair swiveled towards mom? Is your eye contact mostly with dad? Are you inviting questions from the father as well as the mother?
- Images on display. Posters, photos and drawings on the walls of classrooms and hallways can send a powerful message to parents about who is welcome in the school. Check the images you have on display to verify whether both parents are welcome in your school.
- Find out what parents want. One of the most effective but least used ways to involve parents is to find out what interests them about their child's school or childcare program and what they would like to contribute to the school.

References

"A Call to Commitment: Fathers' Involvement in Children's Learning," U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The document was prepared by the National Center for Fathering under contract ED-99-PO-3558 to the U.S. Department of Education.

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